



BUILDING-STRUCTURE INVENTORY FORM

NYS OFFICE OF PARKS, RECREATION
& HISTORIC PRESERVATION
DIVISION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION
(518) 474-0479

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

UNIQUE SITE NO. _____
QUAD _____
SERIES _____
NEG. NO. _____

YOUR NAME: Cynthia Howk DATE: Dec., 1994

133 S. Fitzhugh St.
YOUR ADDRESS: Rochester, NY 14608 TELEPHONE: _____

ORGANIZATION (if any): _____

IDENTIFICATION

1. BUILDING NAME(S): former Dance Hall for Elmheart Hotel
2. COUNTY: Monroe TOWN CITY: Greece VILLAGE: ---
3. STREET LOCATION: 1 Manitou Beach Road
4. OWNERSHIP: a. public ☐ b. private ☒ 7808 Brewerton Rd.
5. PRESENT OWNER: B. & F. Development ADDRESS: Cicero, NY 13039
6. USE: Original: dance hall Present: vacant
7. ACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC: Exterior visible from public road: Yes ☒ No ☐
Interior accessible: Explain boarded up & vacant.

DESCRIPTION

8. BUILDING MATERIAL: a. clapboard ☐ b. stone ☐ c. brick ☐ d. board and batten ☐
e. cobblestone ☐ f. shingles ☐ g. stucco ☐ other composition board
Roof - asphalt shingles. Foundation = not visible. siding - north
elevation; wood board
9. STRUCTURAL SYSTEM: a. wood frame with interlocking joints ☐
b. wood frame with light members ☒ siding on east, west & south
c. masonry load bearing walls ☐
d. metal (explain) _____
e. other _____
(if known)
10. CONDITION: a. excellent ☐ b. good ☐ c. fair ☐ d. deteriorated ☒
11. INTEGRITY: a. original site ☒ b. moved ☐ if so, when? _____
c. list major alterations and dates (if known): _____

(see continuation sheet)

12. PHOTO:

13. MAP:

"This building is a dilemma. It's the only building that's left from the original hotel complex (which has vanished). It's a 'green minus.' Perhaps someone can find a way to rehab and use it again." P.Malo.

COLOR CODE

Green minus



14. THREATS TO BUILDING: a. none known ☐ b. zoning ☒ c. roads ☐
d. developers ☒ e. deterioration ☒
f. other: currently "for sale"
15. RELATED OUTBUILDINGS AND PROPERTY:
a. barn ☐ b. carriage house ☐ c. garage ☐
d. privy ☐ e. shed ☒ f. greenhouse ☐
g. shop ☐ h. gardens ☐
i. landscape features deciduous trees/shrubs
j. other: adjacent to Braddock Bay State Wildlife Management Area.
16. SURROUNDINGS OF THE BUILDING (check more than one if necessary):
a. open land ☒ b. woodland ☒
c. scattered buildings ☒
d. densely built-up ☐ e. commercial ☐
f. industrial ☐ g. residential ☒
h. other: located on West Spit (sandspit) of Braddock Bay;
wetlands to south & east; open water just beyond; Lake Ontario
to immediate north.
17. INTERRELATIONSHIP OF BUILDING AND SURROUNDINGS:
(Indicate if building or structure is in an historic district)

(see continuation sheet)

18. OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES OF BUILDING AND SITE (including interior features if known):

(see continuation sheet)

SIGNIFICANCE

19. DATE OF INITIAL CONSTRUCTION: c. 1931

ARCHITECT: not determined

BUILDER: not determined

20. HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE:

(see continuation sheet)

21. SOURCES:
(see continuation sheet)

22. THEME:
recreational: hotel dance hall; transportation: Manitou
Electric Railroad.

11c.

Contemporary synthetic siding has been installed on the north elevation (over the original horizontal, wood siding), c. 1960s-70s).

The windows and door openings on the exterior have been boarded over, c. 1970s-80s.

The interior of the building appears to have been remodeled for use as a storage facility (boats).

17. This former Dance Hall is located on a 3.4-acre site on the south side of Manitou Beach Road in the northwest quadrant of the town. A driveway and unpaved parking are located to the north of the building. The former site of the Elmheart Hotel is located immediately adjacent to (east of) this building. The surrounding site is open, undeveloped land that is part of the west spit peninsula of Braddock Bay. To the south is Braddock Bay and Braddock Bay State Wildlife Management Area. To the east and north are Manitou Beach and Lake Ontario. To the immediate northwest is a small residential neighborhood of mostly late-19th and early-20th-century houses, but also a few late-20th-century residences.

18. This large building is a one-and-one-half-story, gable-roofed design with rectangular plan. The north elevation features a parapet gable wall with pent roof at the base, as well as two pilasters at the corners. The two doors on the north elevation have been boarded over. Fenestration is regular and symmetrical with pairs of windows along the east and west elevations. The original wood sash (glass has been removed) is visible in only one opening; the other windows have been covered over with wood boards. A pair of large, hinged, paneled doors is located on the east elevation and appears to be the main entrance into the building. Two smaller doorways are also located on the east elevation.

The interior has been remodeled for use as a storage building. Now vacant, the building was previously used for storing boats.

To the east of the former dance hall is a small, one-story, gable-roofed building. It is sided with horizontal, wood

18. continued

boards and is presently vacant. It was used as the ice house for the hotel (per 9/2/1992 Democrat & Chronicle article).

20. Built c. 1931, the former Dance Hall (now vacant) for the Elmheart Hotel is historically significant for its association with the development of the town's lakeshore corridor as an late-19th- and early-20th-century recreational and vacation area. This development was greatly encouraged by the opening of the Rochester, Charlotte, and Manitou Railroad (trolley) in 1891 and the subsequent influence of automobile transportation in the 1920s-'30s.

This building and the adjacent former ice house are the only two surviving structures on this once-heavily developed Manitou Beach peninsula, which in the early-20th century was the site of two large hotels, amusement rides, boat concessions, stables, baseball field, recreational pavilion and extensive picnic grounds, as well as the western terminus for the Manitou Beach Railroad.

Because of alterations and modernizations, the building has lost some of its architectural significance. Its integrity of materials and design has been somewhat compromised.

The 1872 county map shows this area as a large, mostly undeveloped parcel of land. No railroad or public roadway is shown extending north to this remote location. However, one building is shown here on the west spit of land that extends into Braddock Bay. That building is marked as "hotel" and was owned by R.B. Skinner. This was Roswell Skinner, grandfather of Monroe County's most popular sheriff (and Greece native), Albert Skinner. Roswell kept a hotel at Charlotte, then came to Manitou Beach when it was called "Boylan's" because Pat Boylan owned the land there in the 1860s.

Roswell Skinner took over the wooden hotel there that was the first one built along the lake between the Genesee and Niagara rivers. It became known far and wide as Skinner's Hotel where chicken dinners were served for 25 cents. This old building in which Sheriff Skinner and his father, Falding were born, was struck by lightning and burned to the ground in the 1930s.

Point Pleasant, Rhodes' Point and Hicks' Point were early

20. continued

names for this point of land (now Manitou Beach) on the west shore of Braddock Bay. Hicks' Point, named for Samuel Hicks, a Revolutionary War veteran, trapper and hunter who supported his family by peddling meat to his pioneer neighbors, was renamed Manitou Beach after Manitou Springs, Colorado, a popular resort of the Gay Nineties. The name supposedly was chosen by Matthews and Servis, who acquired the lake acreage here in 1888. Their \$50,000 masterpiece, the Manitou Hotel, was opened here on May 30, 1889. This 75-room hotel became the centerpiece of their recreational site, which included a lane of poplar trees. Located on the shoreline of the lake with dramatic views to the north, the large hotel featured two stories of open porches on the facade and a Queen Anne style turret.

In early, 1890, Frederick Odenbach, a Rochester liquor dealer, decided to build a hotel on the Manitou Beach peninsula, just southeast of the Manitou Hotel. Construction of the new hotel (which was eventually named "The Elmheart") was well underway, when an unexpected problem halted the work. The Skinner family, which owned property adjacent to the new project, claimed that it was on their land and took the argument into court. After a trial in 1890, a decision was made in favor of Mr. Odenbach, who proceeded to complete the hotel.

The new establishment was called Odenbach's and ran for several years. But the Skinners did not accept the court decision, and instituted an appeal which was heard by the Monroe County Supreme Court in May, 1894. The plaintiff was Falding Skinner. Falding's father, Roswell, operated a small hotel (actually more of a fishing camp) nearby; it is shown on the 1872 map.

The trial was long and involved. The deciding evidence in the new trial turned out to be surveyor's markings lodged in the heart of an old elm tree. Almost 100 years earlier, in 1802, this land had been surveyed and the surveyor established a line there on the point of land between land and bay, using a tree for a benchmark. Evidence was found inside one of the surviving trees - an elm - during this trial, that convinced the judge that the plaintiff (Skinner) was correct in his appeal and should prevail. The defendant, Odenbach, had to turn over the hotel property to Skinner. News stories of the day tell how the new owner, Skinner, came with a brass band and large entourage to take possession. As

20. continued

the new owner of a fine hotel, he chose the name "Elmheart" (a reference to the surveyor's mark in the tree there) for the establishment.

Mr. Odenbach, in turn, crossed over the bay to the east spit in 1895, where he operated an establishment called "Steelers."

In the meanwhile, the construction of rapid public transit along the lakeshore from Charlotte to Manitou Beach had been completed. In 1891, the Rochester, Charlotte and Manitou Railroad opened. This formerly remote Lake Ontario shoreline became easily accessible to a large number of area residents via public transportation. Rail transportation to Charlotte beach existed previously. Now, area residents could get on the new lakeshore trolley at its Beach Ave. station and head west to any one of the new hotels that were constructed along the shoreline. The trolley line "served hundreds of cottages along its route and carried thousands of city folk on family outings or group excursions to the many popular resorts on the lake. The ride itself was a delight, as the tiny cars bounced along the flimsy tracks, and over fragile trestles across the bays. Some cars were open and waves often lapped the passengers' feet." Trolley service operated only during the summer months.

The ultimate destination of the trolley was Manitou Beach at its western terminus (plans to extend the line to Hilton never materialized). The cars crossed Braddock Bay on a trestle nearly a half-mile long to complete their trip under the big shade trees of Manitou. The Manitou Hotel and the Elmheart Hotel were soon joined by a carousel, shooting gallery, baseball field, picnic grounds, stables, dance hall, water slide and refreshment stand. There were also concessions where visitors could rent boats or bathing suits.

An early advertisement states the attractions of the lakefront as "a trip on the trolley/ eight miles along the shore. Swept by cool lake breezes, visit the charming summer resorts along the line of the Manitou Electric Railroad. Finest fishing grounds in Western New York. Splendid Beach." Another advertisement stated: "SPECIAL EXCURSION RATES from Rochester to Manitou Beach, Braddock's Bay, Cranberry Pond, Long Pond, Crescent Beach, Island Cottage, and all intermediate points on the Manitou Beach line. Round trip 30 cents; half-fare 20 cents. Hotels along the line. Trains

20. continued

from Ontario Beach every few minutes. For arrangements for Picnics and Excursions and other information call W.R. Pollock, Excursion Agent."

The Elmheart Hotel was one of more than a half dozen new hotels constructed along the shoreline to take advantage of the trolley line and its eager vacationers.

Falding Skinner, the son of Roswell Skinner (owner of the Elmheart Hotel), had his first job at Manitou Beach as a youth. For seven or eight years, he ran the boat livery for Matthews and Servis, owners of the Manitou Hotel. Manitou Beach became the "resort of resorts" with the steamboat, "Genesee" running excursions from Charlotte to Manitou Beach. The annual Pioneers' Picnic would draw 20,000 people to the resort in horse and buggy days. Falding Skinner recalled when reservations for hitching accommodations were made a week or two in advance and on picnic day the orchards along the Manitou Road were lined for a mile with rigs and racks. Among Skinner's boat livery patrons was James Wadsworth, later an elder statesman in Congress, who drove up from Geneseo in a tally-ho (large coach) with other Valley gentry.

Headlines of November, 1901 announced that Frederick Odenbach had finally triumphed at Manitou Beach by buying the big Matthews and Servis Manitou Hotel. Odenbach had become immensely popular in Rochester and was nicknamed "Cop," due to his habit of tossing copper pennies on the bar. "Frederick the Great" Cop Odenbach and his four sons ran this hotel until his death in 1919. Family records state he bought it for \$20,000, using \$2,000 worth of his wife Estella's pennies and borrowing from friends.

The 1902 county map shows this area. It is marked, "Manitou Beach." The Odenbach's Manitou Beach Hotel and the Elmheart Hotel are located here. The Manitou Beach Hotel is north of the trolley tracks on the lake's south shoreline. Just to the south of the trolley tracks is the Elmheart Hotel, which also faces north toward the lake. The Elmheart Hotel is located on a 14-acre parcel of land owned by John Slater. To the rear of the Elmheart Hotel are three frame outbuildings: two long structures and a smaller square building. The exact use of these outbuildings is not indicated. However, an early photograph (undated) shows the Elmheart Hotel and its outbuildings. The gable-roofed, frame hotel features a large, square tower and open porches on the north elevation (facing

20. continued

the lake). To the immediate southeast is a complex of interconnected, gable-roofed barns, as well as an icehouse (per caption). To the west of the hotel is a small, gable-roofed building described as the "dance hall." This dance hall, however, appears to be an earlier, smaller structure (not the present dance hall on this site).

Evidently, the ownership of the Elmheart Hotel passed out of the Skinner family by 1902 - as John Slater is listed as the owner of this property on the county map. A Mr. Johnson became owner, then in 1903, the hotel was again sold to Michael O'Laughlin and George Weidman. Weidman's son, young George would continue to own the Elmheart Hotel until his death in 1986 at age 94.

The 1902 county map also shows the residential development that had been established to the immediate west of the Elmheart and Manitou Hotel properties. The recently established subdivision shows nine streets laid out in a grid pattern and 174 lots for housing. Ontario Blvd. is located next to the lakeshore. To the south are Braddocks Ave. and West Ave. with the additional cross streets of First, Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Streets. Nine houses have been built along the lake on Ontario Blvd. This "Manitou Beach subdivision" started as seasonal housing - but eventually developed into a year-'round residential community.

The popularity of the Manitou Beach area reached its apex in the early-20th century. In addition to the very popular Pioneer's Picnic, an annual event drawing thousands to the site, there was a group of sportsmen from Pittsburgh who vacationed here. Called the Old Colony Club, this large group of wealthy businessmen came to Manitou Beach for 21 years. They had their own tents, 13-piece band and dance hall "to which all the countryside was invited." The men pitched their tents on the beach of Manitou, while their wives boarded at the hotel.

After World War I, society began to change dramatically via the increased use of the automobile. More individuals were able to purchase cars. They no longer relied solely on public transportation to reach their recreation and vacation destinations. This change in lifestyle is reflected in 1925 when the last car ran on the Manitou Beach trolley line. During that same year, passenger bus service was established

Town of Greece Historic Sites Survey
Monroe County, New York
1 Manitou Beach Road
page 9

20. continued

on Ridge Road and the last Pioneer Picnic was held here at Manitou Beach.

The 1924 county map shows a detailed map of the Manitou Beach area. To the north of the railroad tracks is the Manitou Beach Hotel with a pavilion and merry-go-round to its immediate southeast. To the south of the tracks is the Elmheart Hotel with four large frame outbuildings (the barns and ice house) and an area marked "park" to the east with an additional five, small, frame outbuildings. There is no dance hall shown on this map.

A 1989 article titled, "How the Elmheart Got Its Name," states that "some years later, the Elmheart built its own hall and brought famed bands including Gene Krupa, Benny Goodman, Henry Bussy and Glen Gray." There is no dance hall shown next to the Elmheart Hotel on the 1924 map. An early photo of the Elmheart Hotel site, however, shows a small, gable-roofed building to the west of the hotel and the photo caption refers to it as the "dance hall." This building is not shown on the maps.

There appears to have been another building in the Manitou Beach area that was used for dancing. The 1989 newspaper article states that there was a "dance hall" that was used by the private Colony Club of Pittsburgh. A February 1, 1948 Democrat & Chronicle article about the area states that "the old dance hall and lunch room, once a gay place, now is being dismantled (in 1948)." This appears to be a reference to the other dance hall on the site - as the Elmheart Hotel's dance hall was still intact in 1948 (and is extant today).

According to a February 6, 1987 Democrat & Chronicle article, the Dance Hall for the Elmheart Hotel was built by George Wiedman in 1931. "In 1931, after two fires caused by patrons who were smoking in bed, Wiedman stopped renting guest rooms and serving meals. But he built a dance hall next to the hotel, and Depression-weary Rochesterians came on evenings and weekends for big-band music."

The 1959 county map shows this property as a large parcel with the Elmheart Hotel, the Dance Hall, a small frame building (the ice house) and a parking lot to the north are shown. "G. Wiedman" is listed as owner.

George Wiedman was 11 years old when his father and uncle bought the Elmheart Hotel in 1903, and he was involved in it

20. continued

the rest of his life (he died November, 1986 at the age of 94). Wiedman changed the spelling of the his family name - it was previously spelled, Weidman. He never married and became known as a local character who had an encyclopedia of lore about Manitou Beach. He ran the 24-room Elmheart as a resort hotel, renting rooms until 1931. The addition of the dance hall in 1931 and the popularity of dancing and big bands kept the establishment busy into the 1940s. The night life and crowds ceased after World War II and Wiedman kept it open as a bar and restaurant on evenings and weekends. In the 1970s and '80s it was open only when Wiedman felt like it - usually on weekends.

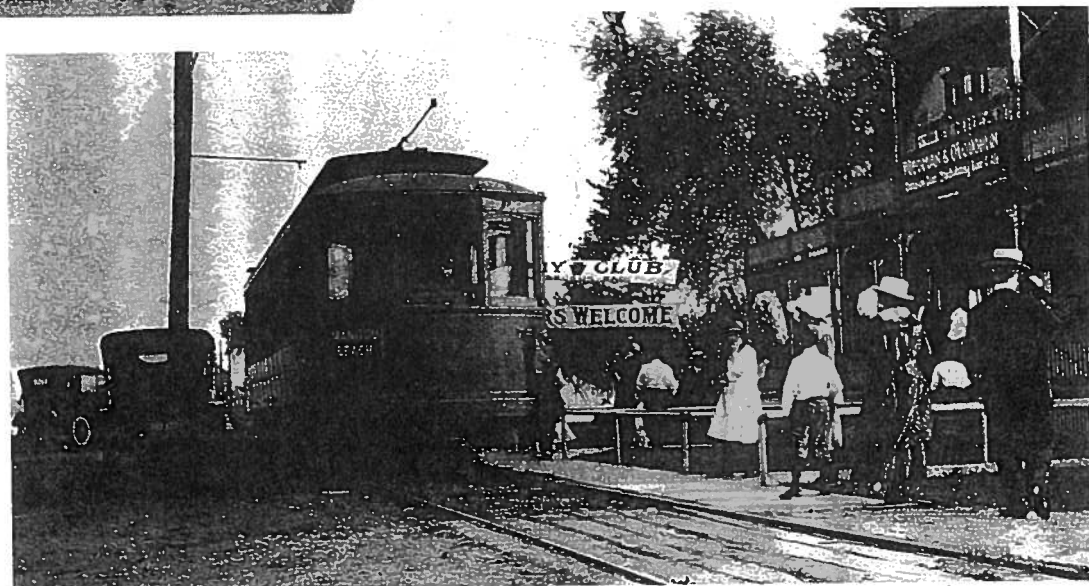
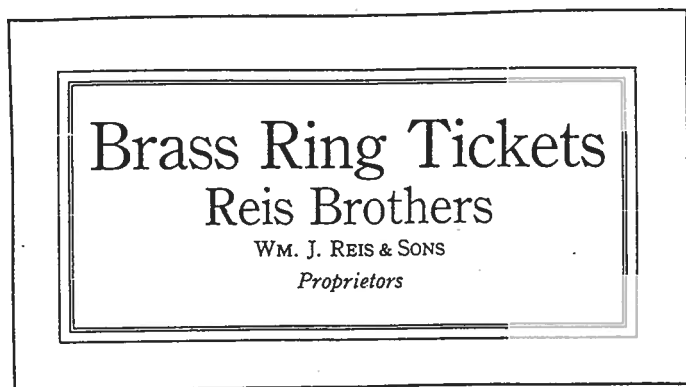
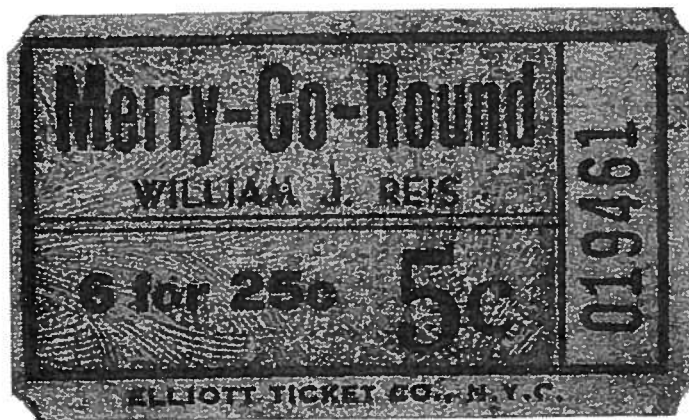
A 1987 article about Wiedman and the hotel states: "It has character. George is the guy who gave it character. ... It's a jukebox that features Glen Miller's Little Brown Jug, narrow pine paneling on the walls and ceilings of the 17 upstairs rooms which haven't had an overnight guest since 1931, and the hard maple floor of the dance hall, which once reverberated to the live sounds of Benny Goodman, Jimmie Lunceford and Cab Calloway."

As lifestyles changed, so did the Manitou Beach area, as it went into a long period of decline in the 20th century. The Colony Club's clubhouse was torn down about 1932. The water slide was torn down in 1934. Odenbach's Manitou Hotel was closed in 1941. Struck by lightning, the old Skinner Hotel burned down. The 1921 refreshment stand became Willliam Kaiser's boat shop about 1975.

The hotel property was sold shortly after George Wiedman's death in November, 1986. The new owners' plans for developing the site with a marina, townhouses and restaurant were delayed due to planning and environmental concerns. On September 1, 1992, the old hotel, with its original antique furniture, burned down in a spectacular early morning fire described as a "suspicious" blaze. The dance hall and former ice house survived this fire.

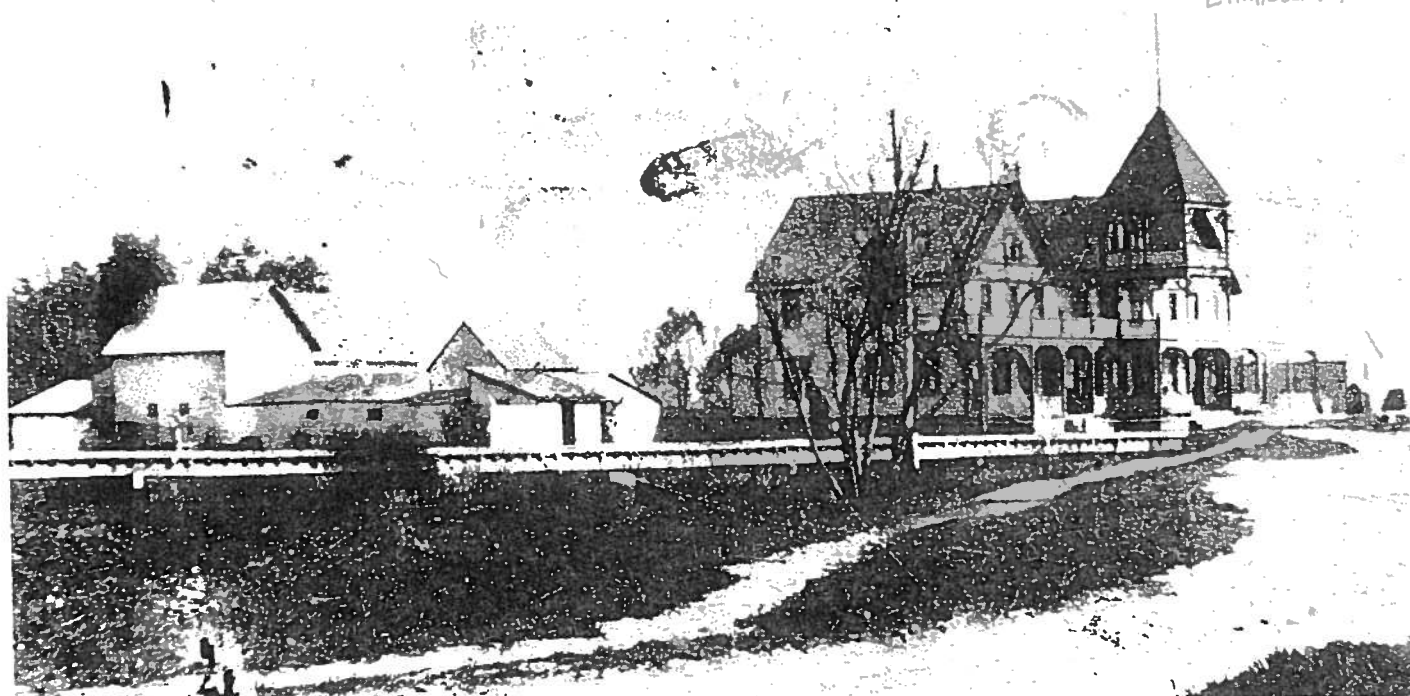
Today, the former dance hall and ice house are among the town's few surviving early-20th-century recreation/resort buildings. They are the only surviving public buildings associated with the development of Manitou Beach as a recreational and vacation community.

21. See final report for bibliography; Town Historian's files.

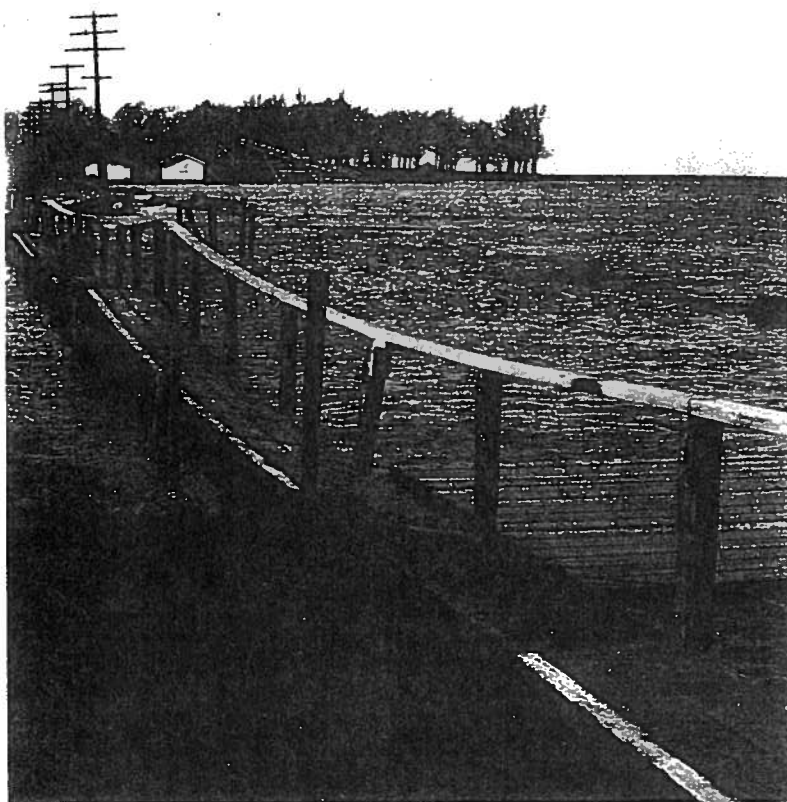


Arriving for a gala day at the beach on the trolley.

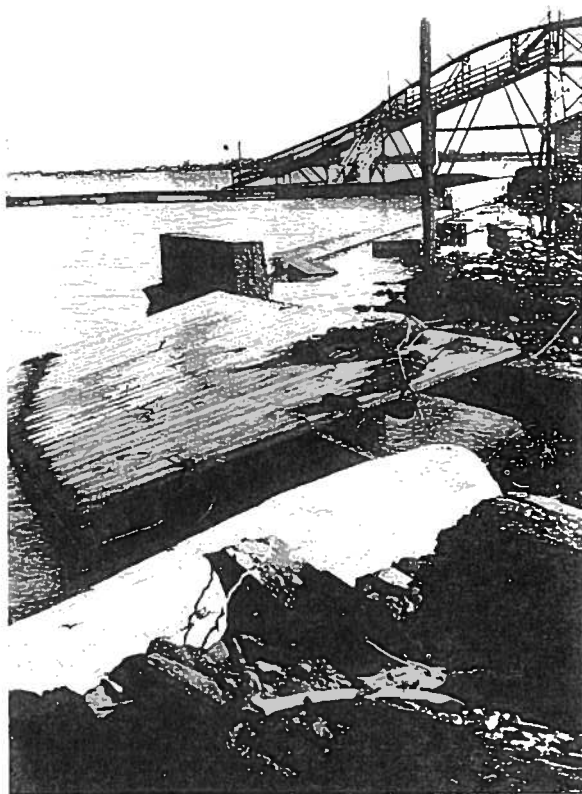
↑
Elmheart Hotel



The Elmheart Hotel, dance hall at right, barns and ice house, left, behind the elevated trolley track.



The catwalk over Braddock Bay after trolley days ended.



Bathing slide.



The Colony Club picnic pavilion and club house on the sand spit, Manitou Beach. Old Skinner Hotel left of pavilion.

